



File Code: 1950

Date: July 15, 2005

Dear Planning Participant,

The Pemigewasset Ranger District of the White Mountain National Forest is initiating an environmental analysis to address sanitation, resource and social concerns in the Franconia Brook area. This proposed project would:

- establish permanent toilets at the Franconia Brook Campground and at the Franconia Falls Day Use Area,
- relocate and rehabilitate nine campsites located along the east bank of the East Branch Pemigewasset River riparian area adjacent to the Franconia Brook Campground,
- consider relocation or rehabilitation of the informal trail which begins on the Lincoln Woods Trail and parallels Franconia Brook from its confluence with the East Branch of the Pemigewasset to Franconia Falls, and
- remove abandoned structures including tent platforms and abandoned outhouses at the former site of the Franconia Brook Campground.

## Project Area

The Franconia Brook Project Area is located in the Town of Lincoln, New Hampshire on the north side of State Highway 112 in an area adjacent to Franconia Brook and its confluence with the East Branch of the Pemigewasset River, south of the 45,000-acre Pemigewasset Wilderness. The Project Area is approximately three miles north of the Lincoln Woods Wilderness Information Center and is accessed by the Lincoln Woods Trail on the west side on the River and by Forest Road 87, which is closed to public motor vehicle access, on the east side of the East Branch of the Pemigewasset River. The Project Area is designated as Management Area 6.1, as described in the White Mountain National Forest Plan (Forest Plan).

## Project Background

The former Franconia Brook campsites (Campground) was located on the west side of the East Branch of the Pemigewasset River near Franconia Falls; the site had been a popular walk-in campground for decades. A shelter, constructed in the late 1950's or early 1960s, was the first developed improvement at the Campground. In the mid 1970's, the overnight use exceeded the shelter capacity; the Forest Service constructed 16 tent platforms in order to protect the site and to handle the increasing numbers of campers. The shelter was removed in the early 1980's due to ongoing vandalism.

In 1984, the Pemigewasset Wilderness was formally designated by Congress; like other Wilderness Areas, visitor use increased dramatically after designation. The Franconia Brook Project Area became, and has remained, the most heavily used portal into the Pemigewasset



Wilderness, serving as a popular base camp for Wilderness day trips as well as a staging area for longer Wilderness excursions. Camping use in the original campground increased to levels that resulted in soil compaction, damage to surrounding vegetation and tent platforms, and higher demand for campground toilets.

Until 1997, the west side Franconia Brook Campground had 16 double tent platforms, which accommodated 64 People at One Time (PAOT), and a "sealed" vault toilet facility. Maintenance access to the vault toilet was via the Lincoln Woods Trail, along the old railroad grade. The vault toilet pumping proved increasingly expensive, and ultimately not serviceable. In the Spring of 1997, because of the increased level of use, site damage, and inadequate toilet facilities, the campground and toilets were closed, though the structures were not removed.

Meanwhile, the Project Area continued to serve as one of the Pemigewasset Wilderness's most popular portals. Without the designated campground, informal camping was concentrated along the first mile of trails inside the Wilderness boundary. The heavy use left dozens of non-designated, dispersed campsites and widespread impacts to vegetation and soil as well as scattered fire rings along the first mile of each of the Wilderness, Franconia Brook, and East Side Trails.

Subsequently in 1998, the Forest Service allowed camping on campsites for 64 PAOT designated along the eastside of the East Branch of the Pemigewasset River. The relocated Franconia Brook Campground's proximity to Forest Road 87 afforded the vital opportunity to seasonally install and pump portable toilets at the east side campsites.

The nearby Franconia Falls Day Use Area (the Falls) is known for easy access to wading and swimming opportunities among large granite rock slabs with natural water slides. Beginning in 1998, a free-use permit system was established which allows up to 60 PAOT to utilize the day use area in summer months. On a given day, while only 60 are permitted on site at any one time, more than 120 people may utilize the site over the course of the day. There are no toilets at this popular site. Visitor Center employees and volunteers are vigilant in providing proper waste disposal information, however, even with near-full compliance, the high level of use concentrated in such a small area allows for adverse risks to public health and resources and compromise of visitor recreation experiences.

## **Purpose and Need**

The Forest Service mission sets high standards for resource protection while offering amenity values, including high quality recreation experiences, to the public. Protecting public health, safety and riparian values, maintaining and protecting habitat for proposed, threatened, endangered, and sensitive species, and maintaining healthy and resilient watersheds into the future have been and will continue to be primary considerations in management of the Franconia Brook Project Area. The purpose of the Franconia Brook Project is to rectify circumstances, including inadequate sanitation facilities, attractive hazards, and impacts to riparian areas, which potentially compromise these standards of resource protection and public safety.

The management challenges at each of these sites have been addressed over the years with a series of short-term solutions. This Project will provide long term protection and enhancement of resources and provide high quality semi-primitive recreation experiences. The Proposed Action proposes site-specific opportunities to address resource and social needs which will improve conditions in the Project Area to more closely coincide with the Desired Condition described in the Forest Plan.

## **Forest Plan Direction**

The Forest Plan designates the Project Area as Management Area 6.1, Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized Recreation. Existing resource conditions in the Franconia Brook Project Area were evaluated against the Project Area's Forest Plan Desired Condition. Based on Forest Plan goals and objectives and the differences between existing conditions and desired conditions for Management Area 6.1, several needs and opportunities for the Project Area have been identified. The following list describes the "needs for change" identified for the Franconia Brook Project Area that would meet the project's purpose to address the public health and resource concerns associated with the campground and the Falls while implementing direction provided in the Forest Plan.

- In the area around Franconia Falls Day Use Area, public health and safety and resource values are threatened due to lack of adequate toilets.
- The trail from the Lincoln Woods Trail to Franconia Falls is a well-used, heavily impacted informal trail. Trail maintenance and/or relocation may more effectively protect soil and water resources while providing visitor access to the Brook.
- Abandoned structures at the closed Franconia Brook Campground on the west side of the East Branch of the Pemigewasset River pose a safety hazard and attractive nuisance as well as adversely affect the forest environment.
- Within the Franconia Brook Campground on the east side of the East Branch of the Pemigewasset River, several campsites are located in the river riparian area. These sites can adversely affect water quality and the integrity of the riparian habitat.
- An environmental analysis was completed in 2001 which considered the effects of relocation of the Franconia Brook Campground from the west side of the river to the east side. This analysis will review the 2001 Environmental Assessment, consider any changed conditions, and, as appropriate, formally document the decision to relocate the campground.
- Camp site improvements including fire rings, site designations, and site hardening may be appropriate at the Franconia Brook campground in order to provide adequate resource protection.
- Weekly pumping of temporary toilets (portable outhouses) is not appropriate for the Project Area because of its designation as MA 6.1. Providing permanent toilet facilities at the Franconia Brook Campground will more appropriately address sanitation needs while meeting Forest Plan Standards and Guides.

## **Proposed Action**

The Proposed Action is to:

- provide primitive toilets (pit toilets), whose locations may be rotated to approved locations, at the Franconia Brook Day Use Area,
- provide permanent toilets at the Franconia Brook Campground on the east side of the East Branch of the Pemigewasset River,
- rehabilitate or relocate the trail which parallels Franconia Brook from the Lincoln Woods Trail to the Falls,
- remove abandoned structures from the former location of the Franconia Brook Campground,

- remove, rehabilitate and relocate nine campsites along the riparian area within the Franconia Brook Campground, and
- formally designate campsites, including fire rings, and hardened sites at the Franconia Campground to accommodate approximately 64 PAOT.

Based on your input, on the recommendations of an interdisciplinary team of resource specialists, and on the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as the Responsible Official, I will decide:

- The level of analysis necessary to assess and document the environmental effects of this proposed project;
- Whether there is sufficient information and analysis to make a decision to implement the proposed project;
- What mitigation measures and monitoring requirements will help assure the proposed project meets Forest Plan standards and guidelines for all resources; and
- Whether a Forest Plan amendment will be required to accommodate this project.

### **How You Can Submit Comments**

You have received this mailing because of your interest in this type of project on the White Mountain National Forest. You may also have received it because you have visited or expressed interest in this area. I am interested in hearing your comments about the proposed project, including any information you have about the Project Area that could help us improve our plans. Your comments may be provided orally or in writing (phone, letter, FAX, or e-mail) and must be received by August 15, 2005. Indicate in your response that your comments are in reference to the proposed Franconia Brook Project. Comments should be addressed to John Serfass, District Ranger in one of the following ways:

- Letters should be submitted to John Serfass, District Ranger, Attn: Franconia Brook Project – 1171 NH Route 175, Holderness NH 03245. Hand delivered letters should be submitted during these office hours: Monday through Friday, 8:00am-4:30pm, excluding holidays;
- FAX comments should be sent to 603-536-5147
- E-mail comments should include an identifiable name and be sent to: [smathison@fs.fed.us](mailto:smathison@fs.fed.us). Comments submitted as electronic documents must be in plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rft) or Word (.doc) format.
- Oral comments may be submitted Monday through Friday 8:00am to 4:30pm, either by phone (603-536-1315) or in person.
- The scoping comment period closes August 15, 2005. It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to submit them by this date.

Please include the following information with your comments:

- Your name, address (include in any email correspondence), and, if possible, telephone number; and
- Site-specific facts or comments concerning the proposed Franconia Brook Project, along with supporting information that you believe I should consider in reaching a decision.

Your views on this project are important to me. If you need more information on this project, please contact Susan Mathison at (603) 536-1315. This information document is also available on the White Mountain National Forest web site ([www.fs.fed.us/r9/white](http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/white)).

The results of our analysis of the Franconia Brook Project will be documented in an Environmental Assessment (EA), and a decision is expected in late 2005. Before a decision is made on this project, you will be given an opportunity to comment (30-Day Comment Period) on that analysis. If you provide comments pertinent to the Franconia Brook Project during the 30-Day Comment Period, you will also be eligible to file an administrative appeal of the Project Decision. You will not be eligible to appeal the decision if you only respond to the Scoping Notice you are now reading.

If you provide comments to the Scoping information now, you will receive the 30-Day Comment Report. If you do not wish to provide comments at this time, but wish to receive the 30-Day Comment Report, please let us know. Anyone who responds to the Scoping information or the forthcoming 30 Day Comment Period, will receive a copy of the Decision Notice when it has been signed.

Thank you for your interest in helping us manage the White Mountain National Forest.

Sincerely,

JOHN J. SERFASS  
District Ranger